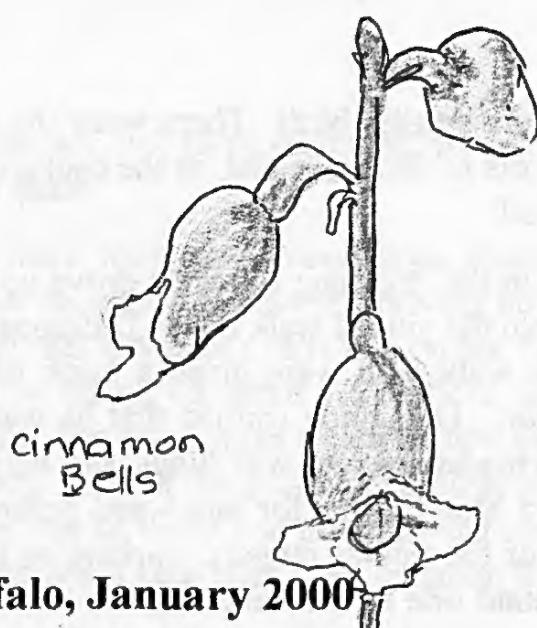


# Castlemaine Naturalist

## March 2000

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Buffalo, January 2000

with the Victorian Nature Photography Group

Noonameena Lodge was a very well chosen place for Naturalist/Photographers to stay over the weekend of 7-10 of January, 2000. Grandson Tristan took himself off up into the bush soon after we arrived and came back with reports of Regent Bowerbirds, Red-browed Treecreepers, Whipbirds and an Olive-backed Oriole, while someone reported that he had found Hyacinth Orchids nearby. A day or two later Tris found Turquoise Parrots.

The program that evening started with slides from various members, some of which took my eye were a moustachioed Spider-orchid, a Rainbow-bird with a dragonfly, and cup fungi on a cowpat.

Speaker for the evening was Clyde O'Donnell who has been conducting guided walks from the Chalet for the last 6 years, and has made several slide shows on Mt. Buffalo. He obviously loves the winter scenery on the mountain, with its mists and snow among the rocks and trees. One I noted was a slide of Sallees in the snow backed by sunlight, another of a brilliant Crimson Rosella against the snow. Clyde explained that the Crimson Rosellas tend to stay on the mountain during the winter because they are fed, but most birds migrate to lower levels, though the Gang Gangs also stay on the mountain feeding on gumnuts.

Mist filled valleys, granite rocks reddened by the setting sun across the snow, the Cathedral in a winter sunrise, Crystal Brook falls in flood, Candlebarks and Hickory wattle, bright pink prostranthera, the lovely Wadell Daisies, and Fringe Lilies, including a white one, Sugar Gliders on a Waratah, a Feather-tail Glider in a hollow and another on a twig, and another one of a tiny Eastern Pygmy Possum, no bigger than a mouse, and finishing with slides taken of stars on time exposure and a couple of shots of lightening. These were the things that he loved and shared with us in, for me, quite magical images.

Next morning before breakfast granddaughter Lucie and I climbed a short distance along the Big Walk through forest that was alive with birds, including Crescent and White-naped Honeyeaters, and a raptor which disturbed the morning

peace for the smaller birds. There were the beautiful purple berries of the flax lilies, lots of Bluebells and, in the background, the cliffs of the gorge on Buffalo itself.

Later in the morning I bravely drove up the mountain with Tristan and Lucie to join the guided walk out to Dicksons Falls. We arrived in good time to join the walk, and were given a book of the alpine flora to help with identification. Our guide warned that he was no expert on birds or plants, but his particular interest was fungi, and he hoped someone could find the brilliant red Star Fungus for him - and before the end of the day I learned from one of the young rangers working at Lake Catani that someone had actually found one in the Park that day. Both the Field Nat. volunteer and the ranger were very well versed in the history and the conservation issues on the mountain.

We went on up to the Horn for lunch, and found that the place was crowded with climbers, abseilers and sightseers in various stages of preparation - or lack of it. I carried both cameras and the tripod to the top, and decided that I am becoming stupid in my old age! But it was all worthwhile for the magnificent views on the top and the wealth of flowers and wildlife (mostly ravens and lizards for the latter I must admit) along the path.

Again in the evening the events of the day were discussed and places to go were recommended and things not to do were advised - like, don't be conned into picking up friendly little Black Ducklings to study one closer if you don't want a belting from one of the parents. We had stopped at the same spot for afternoon tea, and Lucie had felt tempted to pat one of the little ducklings which had nestled near her feet, but she didn't think it was quite the right thing to do, and when she heard of the above incident she was very glad she hadn't given in to the temptation!

The evening program wasn't one for arachnophobes, but for those who can see beauty in spiders and their webs, and enjoy knowledge and information mixed up with some fascinating anecdotes from Arthur Hall, the evening was a delight, and 2 ½ hours didn't really seem that long. The variety of slides that were brought into the evening's talk was fascinating as Arthur demonstrated the various of hunting techniques and webs of different genuses of spiders, and the use that is made of the webs. For instance, numerous birds use spider web for binding their nests together and the Willie Wagtail uses it to coat the outside while dried grass is used in the lining. Many years ago man tried making use of the Golden Orb Webs' strong web to make a garment (if I recall correctly I read many years ago that the garment was a pair of gloves. Rita) He told us that by attaching a small

electric motor they were able to extract 200 yards of thread before the spider ran out, gave her a rest, and then tried again!

During the Saturday evening there were recommendations about where to go next day, and despite the fact I had decided that I wasn't driving up the mountain again, at breakfast I finally decided that I couldn't miss out on the Elbow Orchids which one of the group had found, so off we set about 9 o'clock to find the start of the Ballroom track where they were. The track wasn't hard to find as there were 3 other V.N.P.G. vehicles there already. One of the group generously offered to lend me her small tripod (I'll have to get one of those!) so down I went on the leaf litter to try and photograph these tiny orchids. I then tried the Cinnamon Bells, using my own tripod.

We later walked down to Rollason Falls, stopping on the way to photograph a Greenhood Orchid of which we still haven't agreed to the species. Lucie and Tris elected to visit both upper and lower falls, Grandma jibbed short of the falls themselves - one day I'm going to make it without my knees getting the shakes! While I waited for them to come back up the track I sat and watched the birds and tried photographing Fringe Lilies. Not far from where I stopped on the track down to the lower falls we watched a Bassian Thrush checking out the leaf litter.

In the evening Rob Watkins of Bendigo showed slides of his and Cynthia's Western Australian trip. The thing that impressed me, and I gather Rob and Cynthia too, was the daisy flowers, hectares of them, square kilometres of them, pink, yellow, white; Heliptrum, Helichrysum, Schonia. They had slides of my favourite desert animal too, the strange looking Moloch horridus, or Thorny Devil - neither Moloch, horrid, a devil, or even really thorny. They also saw whales in the Bight, Gimlet gums with their beautiful red, twisted trunks, the Cocklebiddy Caves, Parakeelya flowers, the beautiful Wreath Leschenaultia near Mullawa, Banksias, Bottlebrushes, orchids, Isopogons, Brush-tail Betong, Tropic-birds..... It's all given me very itchy feet again!

As for Buffalo; Lake Catani would be a great place for a campout!

Rita Mills

#### **Bird Atlassing Info.**

There is a Bird Atlassing trip planned for **Thursday March 16**, Leaving the Mostyn St. Tennis Courts at 9 am to explore areas around Tooborac. Take morning tea and lunch and don't forget the binocs! for further information please contact Margaret Badminton on 5473 4555.

Also, Anne Biddley the convenor for the Bendigo area, has issued an invitation to any who would like to join them on the first Sunday of the month, meeting at the Senior Citizens Centre, Old High St., Golden Square. The first is on March 5, to the Olympic Landcare site, Big Hill Range at Ravenswood. The next is

on April 2 at Elvyne Hogan's property and the Yunah and Bradford Roads drought refuges in the Shelbourne/Lockwood Area.

Contacts are Anne Biddley, 5449 4379 and Bev Culvenor 5442 1983 if you are attending and for further details.

### **Gol Gol Wetlands**

A year or two back I received a chart showing the changing bird numbers with experimental floodings of the Gol Gol wetlands in 1992/3 and 1993/4. I found it quite interesting at the time and wrote to the fellow who had given it to a friend who'd given it to my mother, etc. etc.! I wasn't too sure what it was about, but the fluctuation in the numbers interested me. For instance, in Dec. 1992 25 Pelicans were recorded, Dec. '93 there were 7, in March '93 there were 900, in March '94 there were 1800. Little Pied Cormorants were very sporadic, there being either none or one for most observations, but at the end of the experiment there were nine in Jan. '94 and 120 on 30/3/94. Other birds whose numbers increased greatly towards the end of the experiment were Grey Teal, Black Duck and Coots. The number of Coots went from between one and 40, except for Dec. 92, to 1500 in Mar. 94.

The following is the letter that Barry Cox, a young farmer who was living at Gol Gol and involved in the Wetlands experiment at the time sent me to try to explain what the aims of the project were.

"The Gol Gol Community Wetlands Group was formed in 1992/93 to look at ways to repair and restore the Gol Gol swamp and Lake Gol Gol. Both are situated to the North east of Mildura, on the NSW side of the Murray River. The swamp is fed via the Gol Gol creek. When this is full it then flows into Lake Gol Gol and eventually finds its way, via a series of channels, back to the River Murray. This last happened naturally in the 1932 floods.

In 1956 we had the next big flood, but water was prevented from entering the wetlands to protect agricultural land and urban dwellings in Gol Gol and Buronga.

Because of the Mildura Weir pool and irrigation nearby, the ground water has risen to the point that hardly any vegetation will grow in or around the swamp. At this stage the lake is not as bad, but it won't be long before salinity (and forestry) will claim this also.

Please don't get me wrong, I am not a rampant greenie!!!! But I remember the lake as a kid on my motorbike, and it has changed dramatically in my time (and I'm not that old)[He's in his late thirties to mid forties].

We are very restricted at this point as to how much water we can put into the wetlands as all the water has to pass through the Gol Gol creek and we must not flood houses or properties on its banks. I am on the Gol Gol Creek Committee and therefore involved when filling occurs. That is how I ended up on the Reference Group.

Also, the lessees of the swamp and lake are not sure whether allowing water in is good or bad for the wetlands and one says we will make things worse. The Gol Gol swamp and lake were listed about 4 or 5 in a survey carried out along the full length of the Murray river, so it is important that local people get a say in what happens to them not just someone in Deniliquin.

We partially filled the swamp in February 1993 and birds and fish were identified and counted. There were some very good results showing where the birds migrated from, the numbers that used this as a stop over and the numbers that stayed. Also, Murray Cod and Perch were found.

The water was shut off before it reached the lake because if it were allowed to rise too far it would have flooded or salted vegetable growers in Gol Gol North.

The water was then left to evaporate and recede naturally, and two research teams and the WRC carried out further studies on birds, fish and also ground water, doing surveys as to where it was going - up, down or sideways. The swamp has had more water diverted to it since then, but not as much as at that time.

The Group's ultimate aim is to create a reticulating system through the swamp to the lake and then to pump the saline water to a basin at Mourquong that does not leach back into the Murray. This has been done at Mallee Cliffs Interception Works [which we visited at the Mildura campout] east of here where it stops tons of salt a day from entering the river.

The community reference group includes bird watchers, irrigators, WRC reps, the lessees of the wetlands and some others that I'm not sure where they fit in.

At the moment [1998?] we are installing two large concrete culverts so we can deliver more water in a shorter time to the wetlands. The cost of this is about \$70,000 which has come from grants and contributions obtained by the group.

By the way, I have a newspaper article somewhere that tells of a party of people that boated in the 1920s from Mildura up the Gol Gol creek and out to the lake to fish and picnic and it tells of how it used to be.....

Barry Cox

## Observations

- Philip west has sent in another report of birds in the Gower School area. These were observed on 30/12/99 from 2.45 to 4.15 p.m. - Magpie, Welcome Swallow, Fairy Martin, Red Wattlebird, Musk Lorikeet, Fuscous Honeyeater,

Sacred Kingfisher, Yellow-tufted Honeyeater, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, Galah, Rufous Whistler, Brown Treecreeper, Crested Bellbird, White-winged Chough.

- Brenda Envall's was amazed to see a Redback Spider with a small skink, but although seldom seen it is one of the food sources for Redbacks, along with such prey as quite large cockroaches. Coincidentally at the meeting George Broadway reported having watched a skink caught in a Red-back's web and trying to free itself. Feeling that it was probably best to let nature take it's course he went off to finish what he was doing and when he returned a little while later the skink was completely trapped and wrapped.

- John Turnbull reported that a Brush-tailed Phascogale had been the latest victim/cause of an explosion in the transformer near their house. He has seen three Phascogales on the block this season.

- Debbie Worland spotted white-throated Needletails recently near the Castlemaine Golf Course, also there were Dusky Woodswallows with young.

- On Friday Feb. 4 at 8pm on a hot, breathless evening, ZOE reports having watched a swarm of mating Dragonflies at Cassinia Rise, her property on the Campbells Creek - Fryerstown road. She describes the flight as "aerial acrobatics, like a wild game of 'streets and lanes'."

- 8/2/00 - at North Castlemaine, two Honeyeaters, which were eventually identified as Tawny-crowned, were first heard making an alarm call. A Brown-headed Honeyeater, also very agitated, was in the same Cherry Ballart in the yard. Cause for all the fuss was an immature Brown Goshawk which was sitting in the old Early Black Wattle next to the tree they were in. Rita Mills

- There is a lot to be said for sitting quietly in a chair beside a lake or stream, in particular, for an hour or so. Margaret Badminton certainly found this when she sat by Jim Crow Creek and had two adult and one juvenile Reed Warbler come right up to the grass by her chair, quite unfazed by her presence.

- There seems to be an unusual amount of Kangaroo Grass wherever you travel this season, and Margaret Dunne remarked on the extraordinary amount that she has on her property near Maldon.

- On one of her Atlassing trips Margaret Badminton reports seeing 2 Spotted Quail-thrushes on the Hepburn Road near Daylesford. She had been moving very slowly in the car when they crossed the road, and she was able to watch them for 3-4 minutes. They flew onto a low branch, the first time she has ever seen them land in a tree.

- It was noted by John Turnbull, George Broadway and Rita Mills that there have been huge numbers of Dragonflies at John's Barkers Creek property, the Moonlight Flat Pine Plantation and the Poverty Gully Track in

mid to late February. (Anything to do with the change of weather at that time?)

- Also at that time, flocking of swallows and Starlings was noted.
- In Wildflower Drive near One tree Hill in Bendigo Simon Kennedy spotted a lone Fork-tailed Swift. He also heard a Black-eared Cuckoo and saw a male Crested Bellbird and Diamond Firetails.

#### FROM THE BUSINESS MEETING -

##### **Feasibility Study Grant**

Calder Regional Waste Management Group (Bendigo) has been granted \$10,000 for a feasibility study for the establishment of a moulded packaging facility. The project description is "to determine feasibility of the set-up of a low cost, labour intensive moulded paging plant in the Calder Region. Potential products include egg trays and low volume packaging products which established large players cannot afford to produce because they are geared for high volume lines".

The club has been sent a summary of the Grants by Ecorecycle, and a complete report will soon be available by E-mail by contacting Ecorecycle on -

[mailbox@ecorecycle.vic.gov.au](mailto:mailbox@ecorecycle.vic.gov.au).

##### **Advance Notice of Conference**

The Woodlands Department of the Victorian National Parks Association has sent an advance notice of a two day conference to be held at Latrobe University, Bendigo, June 8 & 9. The subject is "Woodland Protection and Firewood - Keeping Both".

Up to 1.5 million tonnes of firewood is consumed each year - most of it coming from natural bush. A solution is already underway - growing firewood on already cleared farmland. It gives the farmer a cash crop, reduces salinity and soil loss, and can provide healthy habitat if done well.

The aim of the conference is to foster discussion and solutions to the problems.

Details of this notice are available from the secretary, or at the meeting, and further details will be forthcoming from the Association later on.

##### **Adopt-a-Highway**

A good number turned up for the latest cleanup, which took just the hour to do. We were able to collect some seed, which will be used later for revegetation of the area.

##### **Subscriptions**

After discussion the annual meeting decided that it was unnecessary to put up the subscriptions, and so they remain the same as last year.

**Subscriptions are now due.** If yours is up-to-date a (p) will appear on the address label.

The Club has again subscribed as a Member of the V.F.N.C.A.

Castlemaine Naturalist, March 2000  
**C.F.N.C. PROGRAMME**

**General Meetings** Are held in the Uniting church (UCA) hall, at 8.00pm on the second Friday of each month, except January. Entrances to the car parks are beside the Art Gallery and beside the Church building in Lyttleton Street. **Excursions** leave promptly at times stated, usually on the Saturday after the general meeting. There are NO excursions on TOTAL FIRE BAN days.

**Business Meetings** are held at 38 Campbell Street on the 4th Thursday of each month, except December, at 7.30pm. All members are invited to attend.

**VISITORS ARE ALWAYS WELCOME TO CLUB MEETINGS AND EXCURSIONS**

Fri. Mar 10 **The Loddon Water Catchment** Speaker is Greg Peters of the Water Catchment Authority. Greg gave us a very interesting talk in August on his work on stream management.

Sat Mar. 11 **Upper Loddon Forest, Glenluce South.** Leave 13 Mostyn St. at 1.30pm

Fri. - Mon. ,Mar. 10-12. **VFNCA Campout at Geelong.**

Fri. Apr. 14 **The Diggings Project.** The speaker will be one of the guides who is studying the area. UCA hall 8pm

Sat. April 15 **A visit to the Diggings Project.** Leave 13 Mostyn St. at 1.30 pm.

Fri. May 12 Speaker is Alan Reid. subject to be confirmed.

Sat May 13 **The Broken Bridge, Eddington.** Leader, E Perkins. Leave 13 Mostyn St. at 1.30pm.

**Midwinter Meeting, July?** It is planned to have a meeting during winter where members can pass on information about their favourite interesting places in Victoria. Put your thinking caps on and be ready to contribute.

Sat July 15. **Fungi, Bullarto Reservoir.** Leave 13 Mostyn St. at 1.30pm.

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**Committee** M. Dredge (President) ph 5470 6474, E. Perkins (V.P. and Grievance Officer), G. Broadway (Sec.), ph. 5472 2513, J. Turnbull (treas.) ph. 5474 3005, R. Mills (N/L Ed. and P.O.), M. Oliver, C. Morris, K. Turner, Z. Thomas, B. Maund .

**Subscriptions for 2000 -**

Ordinary Membership: Single \$22 Family, \$30

Pensioner or student: Single \$19 Family \$24

Supporting: \$31

The subscription also covers postage of the 'Castlemaine Naturalist'.

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.

P.O. Box 324, Castlemaine. 3450.

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